

LEGENDARY 1950s EC COMICS!



NO. 23
MAR



250
3rd
CANADA

TALES FROM THE CRYPT

FEATURING...



THE CRYPT-KEEPER



THE OLD WITCH



THE VAULT-KEEPER



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THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HELLO! SO YOU'RE BACK FOR MORE BORE, CHILDFRIEND? WELL, THIS IS THE SPOT FOR IT! WELCOME TO THE CRYPT OF TERROR! THIS IS YOUR MOST INNOCUOUS, THE CRYPT-KEEPER, READY TO START THE BRAINS ROLLING IN MY READING-SEAS! WITH ANOTHER SPINE-TINGLING TALES FROM MY CREEP-COLLECTION. TIGHTEN YOUR BELTS SO YOU WON'T BE SCARED OUT OF YOUR PANTS, AND I'LL BEGIN THE BLOOD-COMIC-CHILL.

UNDERTAKING PALOR



THERE IS A HORRID CURIOUSITY IN CHILDREN, A STRANGE FASCINATION WITH DEATH. IT HURRIES THEM TO THE SCENES OF ACCIDENTS, DRAWS THEM INTO MOVIE THEATERS TO WATCH IT UNFOLD ON SILVER SCREENS, PROMPTS THEM TO MAKE BELIEVE ABOUT IT... AND DRAWS THEM TO KNOCKS IN UNDERGROUND PARLORS.

WHAT'S HE HE'S TAKIN' OFF THE HILL AGAIN? CHUBBY? GLOWEYES? YOU?



INSIDE THE MORTUARY, OBLIVIOUS TO THE WIDE SPYING EYES THAT FOLLOWED HIS EVERY MOVE, AWFULL ESPROCK LABORED SLOWLY, DELIBERATELY, AS IF HE ENJOYED HIS WORK...



THE PUMP BEGAN TO CHUG, SURGULING THE SCARLET LIQUID OUT OF THE DEAD BODY THROUGH THE PULSATING TUBE AND SENDING IT INTO THE PORCELLAIN SINK.

BOLLY! WE COULD CHARGE THE REST OF THE GANG ADMISSIONS TO WATCH FIVE!



AN, BLOODGUT! YOU'RE ALWAYS THINKIN' OF WAYS TO MAKE MONEY!

DEATH IS THE UNKNOWN IN THE LIFE EQUATION. IT IS THE ULTIMATE FINAL RESULT OF EVERY LIVING EXAMPLE. IT IS THE UNANSWERABLE TO YOUNG MINDS SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS.

NOW HE'S (BOLLY!) I DON'T FEEL SO GOOD!



SO IT WAS ONLY NATURAL FOR CHUBBY AND PETE AND BILLY AND PERCIVAL TO WANT TO SEE MORE OF THIS UNPATHOMABLE PROBLEM. TO WANT TO LEARN WHAT WENT ON BEHIND MR. ESPROCK'S CLOSED MORTUARY DOORS.

IF IT MAKES (LASH!) HE'S SICKEN YOU BACK, DON'T LOOK, PERCY!



AND AS HE WORKED, EVERILL HUMMED SOFTLY, FILLING THE MORTUARY WITH HIS MYSTERIOUS MUSIC...

HE'S TURNIN' ON SOME KIND OF MOTOR!



HE'S PUMPIN' BLOOD OUT THE BLOOD, THAT'S WHAT HE'S DOING!



AFTER A WHILE THE SURGULING STOPPED AND THE PUMP RAN DUSTILY.

THE BLOOD'S ALL PUMPED OUT!

NOW WHAT?

HE'S TAKIN' DOWN THAT BIG JUG OF BLOOD!

MR. ESPROCK RINSED THE HORN THAT RAN OFF INTO THE RED-STAINED PORCELAIN SINK AND PUSHED IT INTO THE NECK OF THE JUG WITH THE COLORLESS LIQUID...



AVERILL PRESSED A SWITCH, THE PUMP REVERSED ITSELF, THE BURBLING BEGAN AGAIN. THE COLORLESS LIQUID IN THE JUG BEGAN TO SLOWLY DISAPPEAR, FORCED INTO MR. GROTE'S EMPTY ARTERIES...



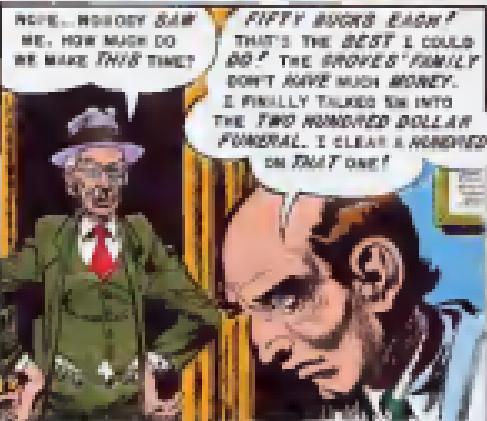
THE LAST DROP OF THE EMBALMING FLUID GURLED OUT OF THE JUG AS THE LAST DROP OF A SODA IS SUCKED FROM A FOUNTAIN GLASS THROUGH A FRAMED STRAW. MR. ESPROCK SHUT OFF THE MOTOR...

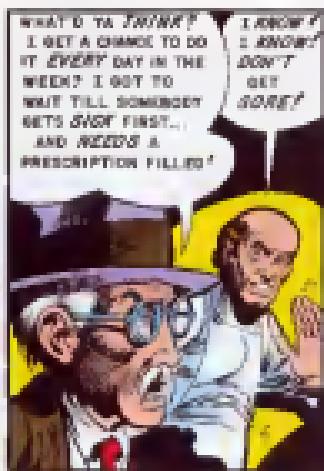


SOMEWHERE IN THE MORTUARY, A BELL TINKLED. MR. ESPROCK STIFFENED. A FIGURE SWUNG ASIDE THE CURTAINS AND CAME INTO THE BACK ROOM...



THE KIDS PEERING THROUGH THEIR PEEP-HOLE WHISPERED EXCITEDLY. IT'S MR. GROTE! THE DOWNSIDE! WHAT'S HE WANT?







AFTER CHUBBY LEFT, PETE TOLD HIS PLANS TO BILLY, THEN THEY WENT AROUND TO THE FRONT OF MR. ESPROCK'S MORTUARY AND WAITED. THEY WAITED UNTIL MR. ESPROCK CAME OUT.

MR. ESPROCK "AHHH! YOU DON'T SAY, BILLY'S WRONG!" YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOOD, MR. ESPROCK!"

"YOU LOOK PALE, MR. ESPROCK. YOU LOOK SICK!"

"YOU GOSHIN' DOWN WITH SOMETHIN', MR. ESPROCK?"

"I DON'T KNOW! EXCUSE ME, BOYS!"

MRI. ESPROCK WENT BACK INTO THE MORTUARY. THE KIDS DARTED AROUND TO THE BACK WINDOW IN TIME TO FEAR...

"HELLO, MR. SPERRY! CAN ER... NAME YOU'D BETTER SEND THAT TONIC OVER AFTER ALL! I DO FEEL KINDA... KINDA... RUN DOWN!"



OUTSIDE MR. GRUDY'S STORE, CHUBBY WAITED PATIENTLY. FINALLY, MR. GRUDY CAME OUT...

"HOW YOU LIKE TO MAKE A ARRANGEL, CHUBBY? DELIVER THIS PACKAGE OVER THERE, ESPROCK AT THE AMBER-TAKING PARLOR..."

"GIVE THIS TO MR. GRUDY!"



CHUBBY TOOK THE PACKAGE AND RUSHED STRAIGHT TO THE GLASS HOUSE WITH IT. PETE AND BILLY WERE WAITING...

"HERE IT IS!" "GIVE, FOOL, IT OUT..." "HERE'S THE CAT-POISON..."



MR. ESPROCK OPENED THE DOOR TO HIS MORTUARY TO SEE CHUBBY STANDING BEFORE HIM, HOLDING A STRAY CAT IN ONE HAND AND THE BOTTLE OF 'TONIC' IN THE OTHER...

MR. GRUDY ASKED "OH, CHUBBY! YOU, CHUBBY? THIS, MR. ESPROCK?"

CHUBBY HELD OUT THE BOTTLE OF 'TONIC', LETTING IT SLIP FROM HIS FINGERS!

"HERE TAP-DOODLE!" "LOOK OUT, YOU GLUMSY."



THE BOTTLE SMASHED INTO A THOUSAND GLITTERING FRAGMENTS AND THE 'TONIC' POOLED OUT OVER THE MORTUARY FLOOR. CHUBBY RELEASED THE STRAY CAT...

"BILLY! I'M SORRY, MR. ESPROCK... I... I... RECKLESSLY!"

"GET THAT CAT OUT OF HERE!"



THE CAT WAS BURSTLY LAPTING UP THE SPILLED TONIC. CHUBBY HESITATED...

I SAW YOU THAT CAT OUT OF HERE!

LOOK MR. ESPROCK!

THE CAT WAYERED, FILLED WITH THE RAT-POISON. IT SQUEALED AND ROLLED OVER...

WHAT HAPPENED TO IT?

GOOD LORD IT'S DEAD!

MR. ESPROCK STUCK HIS FINGER INTO THE POOL OF "TONIC" AND SMELLED IT...

WHY THAT ISN'T DOUBLE-CROSSING... THIS IS POISON!

WELL, I GOT TO GO, MR. ESPROCK!



THE NEXT DAY, PERCY'S FATHER'S FUNERAL WAS HELD IN A STEADY DOWNPOUR. THE BOYS WATCHED FROM A HILL...

THREE ESPROCK FELL FOR IT?

WILL SEE TOMMONT WHEN HE MEETS GRUDGY!



LATE THAT NIGHT THE KIDS WAITED FOR MR. ESPROCK TO EMERGE FROM HIS MORTUARY. TOWARD MIDNIGHT, HE CAME OUT. THEY FOLLOWED HIM AT A TAPE DISTANCE AS HE MADE HIS WAY SLOWLY OUT OF TOWN...

HE'S HEADED FOR THE CEMETERY!

E-E-SOLLY!

CHUBBY!



PETE AND BILLY AND CHUBBY FOLLOWED MR. ESPROCK INTO THE CEMETERY. MR. GRUDGY WAS WAITING...

THAT FOOL ANDYLL?

SURPRISED, GRUDGY? YOU THOUGHT I'D BE DEAD BY NOW, DIDN'T YOU?



WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, ANDYLL?

I'M TALKING ABOUT THAT POISONED TONIC YOU SENT ME, MORT. ABSOLUTELY THE NO DROPPED IT!





THE VAULT OF HORROR!

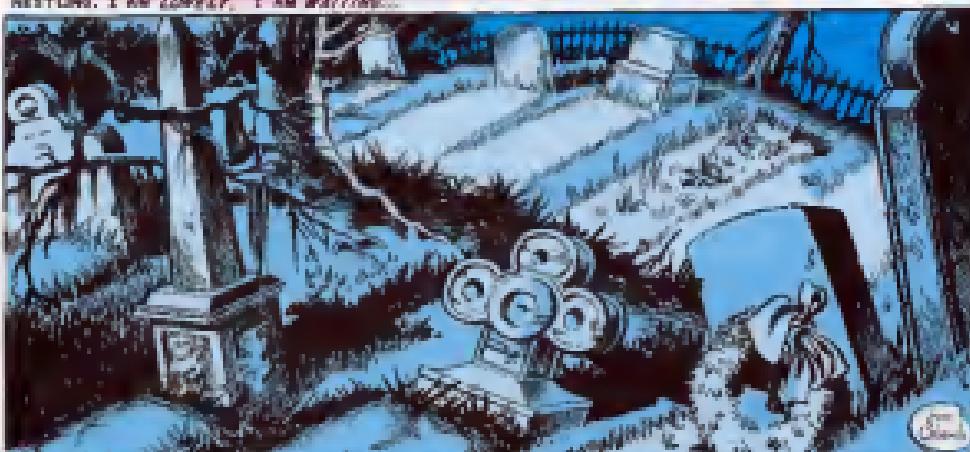
HEH, HEH, AND HOW, VULPINES, IF YOU WILL PERTAIN
INTO THE VAULT OF HORROR, YOUR HOST, THE
VAULT-KEEPER WILL ENTERTAIN YOU. FOR THIS,

MY FINAL FICTIONAL FILM, I HAVE CHOSEN A
GRAVE TALE. HEH! IT'S TOLD BY A GRAVE!"
SO, CIRCLE UP TO THAT CORPSE OVER THERE AND
I'LL BEGIN THE DRAMA OF DREAD AND DEATH
CALLED...

THE CRAVING GRAVE!



THE WIND BLOWS SADLY ACROSS THE SNARLED AND BENT TREES AROUND ME. IT WHISPERS PAST THE COLD
STONE MONUMENTS THAT THE OTHERS PROUDLY HOLD UPWARD TOWARD THE NIGHT SKY. BUT UPON MY BREAST
THERE IS NO COLD STONE FOR THE WIND TO SING OVER. I LIE SILENT WITH AN EMPTINESS WITHIN ME... A
TLERRING. THE OTHERS SIGH CONTENTEDLY, SHIFTING AND CRACKING, EMBRACING THEIR CHARGES... THEIR RID
CHILDREN. BUT I AM BARREN, FRUITLESS. BEHEATH MY MOUNDRED OUTER SKIN-CRUST, NO RIBS CHARGE LIES,
RESTLESS. I AM LONELY. I AM BUITING...



I AM AN UNOCCUPIED GRAVE, SWING WITH THE CRYING WIND... WAITING FOR MY LONELINESS TO END...
WAITING FOR A BODY.

I HAVE WAITED LIKE THIS THROUGH THE CENTURIES, WATCHING THE OTHERS AROUND ME, EACH IN THEIR TURN, OPEN WIDE THEIR YAWNING MOUTHS AND TAKE IN THEIR HARDS, CRADLING THEM HAPPILY WITHIN THEIR EARTH-HOMES.



ON NIGHTS LIKE THIS ONE... WHEN THE SKY IS OVERCAST WITH LOW HUMMING RAIN-CLOUDS, WHEN I CAN SEE NO STARS... I CAN ONLY LIE AND LISTEN TO THE HAPPY CHATTERING OF THE GRAVES AROUND ME GUARDING, PROTECTING, CARING FOR THEIR BROOD. I CAN ONLY LIE AND LISTEN AND TEAR. I PEARN FOR THE DAY WHEN I, TOO, WILL REACH FORTH AND DEAR IN MY DEATH-ETUDES AND HOLD IT FAST, SICKLING IT WITH MY GUMMERS.



BUT, BOY! WHAT IS THAT I HEAR? VOICES IN THE WIND... VOICES IN THE NIGHT... VOICES OVER ME? AND WHAT IS THAT I FEEL? GOLD STEEL RENTING MY CHEST... CRACKING OPEN MY EARTH-SKIN...



WHAT? BOY! WHY DON'T PEOPLE DIE IN THE SOMMERTIME? WHEN THE GROUND IS SOFT?



THERE IS A TROUBLING SIGH DEEP WITHIN ME... A SIGH OF EXCITEMENT AND ANTICIPATION. THE WIND DIES... AND THE LAUGH-TER DIES...



HOW OLD WAS SHET?

SIXTY-THREE...

6

I HAVE LAIN FALLOW THROUGH THE FREEZER AND THE THAW, HEARING THEM NURSING THEIR FOSTER-CHILDREN, AND LONGING FOR MY OWN. ON SUNDAYS, I HAVE LISTENED TO THE MOURNERS AND REMEMBERS COME AND CRY UPON THE OTHERS AND PLACE FLOWERS UPON THEIR EARTH-HOMES.



AND ALWAYS, WHEN THE WIND COMES UP ACROSS THE OTHER GRAVES, IT CARRIES THEIR LAUGHTER TO ME. THEY LAUGH BECAUSE THEY HAVE FULFILLED THEIR PURPOSE. THEY LAUGH BECAUSE THEY ARE NO LONGER EMPTY AND BARREN AND CHILDLESS. THEY LAUGH AT ME...



USE' HARD AS A ROCK!

HERE, USE THE PICK...

ALL THESE YEARS OF WAITING. ALL THESE YEARS OF LONGING AND YEARNING AND CRYING. THEY'RE ALMOST OVER. THOSE MEN UPON MY CHEST... THEY'RE DROWNED DOWN THERE...



AND NOW IT IS MORNING. I LIE WITH MY INSIDES TORN FROM ME AND HEAPED UP AT MY SIDE. I LIE OPEN, FEELING THE SUNLIGHT. THE COLD AIR. I HEAR THE CRUNCHING STEPS THAT I HAVE HEARD SO OFTEN. HEAR THE GRIETS OF THE FILLBEARERS THAT HAVE NEVER UNTIL THIS DAY DELIVERED UNTO ME. AND I SMILE.



THE COFFIN IS LOWERED. I REACH UPWARD FOR IT, ACCEPTING IT, FILLING OF ITS SMOOTHNESS, AND SENSING OF ITS CONTENTS. MY DEATH-HALED, MY COFFIN-CHARGE... MY OWN.



THE DRAVE DIGGERS TRUDGE OFF. I AM FULFILLED. THE EMPTINESS WITHIN ME IS GONE. THE TEARLESS VASHER. THE BODY LIES GUARDED INSIDE ME. I WHISPER TO IT, SOOTHING IT, COMFORTING IT IN ITS FINAL REST...



THE DAYS AND WEEKS PASS. BUT THE BODY WITHIN MY FOLD DOES NOT LIE AT REST. THE BODY WITHIN ME IS NOT AT PEACE. THERE IS A STIRRING INSIDE THE COFFIN, NESTLING IN MY BOSOM. A FLUTTERING... A SCRATCHING...



I LISTEN WITH A DRUNKEN JOY TO THE CEREMONY, FEELING THE MOURNERS' FEET UPON MY BREAST. THERE ARE NOT MANY MOURNERS... A MOTHER, HIS WIFE, AND A LATER FRIEND. BUT I DO NOT CARE. IT IS NOT THE GRIEF THAT COMES I AM INTERESTED IN. IT IS THE ONE FOR WHOM THEY GRIEVE.



THE MOURNERS LEAVE. THE BRAVE DIGGERS STEP FORWARD WITH THEIR SHOVELS. I EMBRACE THE COFFIN MORE AND MORE AS THEY RETURN MY SOIL-BURDEN TO ME. THEY STAND, FINALLY, UPON MY REARRED BODY, TAMPING DOWN MY OUTER SKIN, STITCHING AT THE WOUNDS.



THE BODY TELLS ME HER STORY. HER NAME IS CYNTHIA MEADOWS. SHE WAS, LIKE ME, LONELY ALL HER LIFE. SHE'D REMAINED UNMARRIED, BARREN, FRUITLESS, TEARING FOR THE THINGS HER MARRIED SISTER ENJOYED.



THE BODY STIRRING WITHIN ME TELLS ME OF THE LONELY YEARS... THE LONGING SHE'D FELT FOR A CHILD OF HER OWN, AND I UNDERSTAND, HADN'T I FELT THE SAME AS SHE?

MAMA SAID YOU'RE AN OLD MAID, AUNT CYNTHIA. WHAT'S AN OLD MAID?

IT'S... IT'S A WOMAN WHO NEVER MARRIES, ROLAND, A WOMAN WHO HAS NO CHILDREN OF HER OWN.



AND THE EMPTY YEARS HAD CRAWLED BY AS THEY CRAWLED FOR ME. SHE MADE WISE INVESTMENTS OF THE INHERITANCE SHE'D SHARED WITH HER SISTER, AND SHE'D GROWN WEALTHY, WHILE HER SISTER...

GEORGE'S BUSINESS FAILED, CYNTHIA. HE'S LOST EVERY CENT WE HAD!

I'M SORRY, MYRA. I'LL TRY TO HELP YOU!



MYRA'S FALLEN ILL SUDDENLY, SHE'D DIED WITHIN THE WEEK...

WHAT, SORRY? WHAT ABOUT ROLAND, CYNTHIA? WHAT WILL I DO WITH HIM?

I'LL... I'LL LOOK AFTER HIM, GEORGE... IF YOU WANT ME TO.



AND SO, THE LONELY YEARS HAD ENDED FOR CYNTHIA AS MY LONELY YEARS HAD ENDED, SHE'D TAKEN ROLAND TO HER BOSOM AS I'D TAKEN HER...

BUT I WANT MY MUMMY!

YOU MOTHER HAD SOME AWAY, ROLAND. SHE'S GONE AWAY FOR A LONG TIME.



SHE'D FELT THE LAUGHTER... THE SCORN AROUND HER AS I'D FELT SCORN. SHE'D WATCHED THE OTHER WOMEN SHE KNEW MARRY AND HAVE CHILDREN, AND SHE'D CRIED AS I'D CRIED...

SORRY, SORRY...

ROLAND, EDITH'S DINNER'S READY.

YES, MUMMA!



AND SHE'D WAITED THROUGH THE YEARS... AS I'D WAITED. FINALLY...

WHAT IS IT, GEORGE?

IT'S AFGHA, CYNTHIA. SHE'S DESPERATELY ILL. PLEASE... COME, QUICKLY!



ROLAND'S ARRIVAL IN CYNTHIA'S HOUSE HAD MEANT THE END OF THE LAUGHTER AROUND HER, THE END OF SCORN... JUST AS AFGHAN'S ARRIVAL HAD MEANT THE END OF SCORN FOR ME...

ROLAND, DINNER'S READY, SORRY!

YES, MUMMA!



CYNTHIA, TOO, HAD BEEN FULFILLED. SHE'D GUARDED ROLAND, COMFORTED HIM, AND HE'D GROWN INTO MANHOOD. BUT THERE WAS A STIRRING WITHIN HIM... JUST AS NOW, CYNTHIA STIRS.

I'M GOING AWAY, AUNT CYNTHIA. I CAN'T STAY HERE ANY LONGER.

ROLAND! DON'T LEAVE ME! PLEASE.



AND THEN SHE'D DISCOVERED HOW ROLAND HAD LEFT SO SUDDEDLY...

THE MONEY! I HAD THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS IN THIS DRAWER. IT'S GONE!

Poor Cynthia. How sorry I feel for her... to yearn for something... to yearn for it for so long... to finally get it, and then to lose it once more. She tells me of how broken-hearted she was.

ROLAND, ROLAND...



CYNTHIA HAD BEEN SO GLAD TO SEE ROLAND SHE'D COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN THE CRIME HE'D COMMITTED WHEN HE'D LEFT...

THIS IS MY BOY ERIC, AUNT CYNTHIA. ERIC, THIS IS MY AUNT CYNTHIA...

ROLAND'S TOLD ME SO MUCH ABOUT YOU, AUNT CYNTHIA!



THE SCRATCHING, CLAWING BODY WITHIN ME TELLS HOW ROLAND HAD LEFT HER. DESPITE HER PLEADING, LEFT HER TO THE LAUGHTER AND THE SCORN AROUND HER ONCE MORE...



SHE TELLS ME HOW SHE'D TRIED TO FORGET HIM. SHE TELLS ME HOW HER INVESTMENTS HAD CONTINUED TO MAKE HER WEALTHIER AND WEALTHIER. AND THEN, SIX YEARS LATER...



THEY'D COME TO LIVE WITH HER. ROLAND'S BIDDEN CYNTHIA'S FORGIVENESS.

I WAS FOOLISH AND FOOLISH, AUNT CYNTHIA. IT WAS WRONG OF ME TO TAKE THE MONEY! I'M SORRY!

THOSE, THOSE, ROLAND. IT HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO!



SO SINCE MORE THE LAUGHTER AND BOOR AROUND
CYNTHIA'S DIED AWAY. ROLAND HAD COME BACK AND
HE'D BROUGHT HIS WIFE. CYNTHIA HAD TWO CHILDREN
NOW...

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW
HAPPY YOU'VE
MADE AN OLD
LONELY WOMAN,
THIS... ROLAND!

WE BOTH LOVE
YOU, AUNT
CYNTHIA!

YES, AUNT
CYNTHIA.



AND NOW I KNOW WHY THE BODY I EMBRACE
WITH MY LIFE - WOMAN IS NOT AT PEACE. NOW I
KNOW WHY IT SQUATONES AND STOPS INSIDE... CYNTHIA
MEADOWS HAD BEEN MURDERED...



THE BODY WITHIN ME TURNS AND PUSHES AND
SQUATONES I TRY TO STOP IT TRY TO MAKE MY
INIDES HARD... BUT IT IS DETERMINED. THEN,
ONE NIGHT, MONTHS AFTER I HAD FIRST
EMBRACED IT... THE BODY PUNCHED UPWARD INTO
THE COOL AIR. PUSHED OUTWARD PAST MY
CRUST-SKIN.



BU T THEN CYNTHIA TELLS ME WHAT ROLAND AND
EMI HAD PLANNED.

ONCE WE GOT HER TO MAKE
OUT A WILL LEAVING
ALL OF HER DOUGH
TO US...

WE KNOCKED
HER OFF!



HER MEGE AND NEPHEW HAD PUSHED HER DOWN A LONG
FLIGHT OF CELLAR STAIRS. THEY'D TOLD THE DOCTOR...

WE HEARD HER Scream
AND FALL! WE CAME AS
FAST AS WE COULD WHEN
WE GOT HERE. SHE...

WHAT A
HORRIBLE,
HORRIBLE
ACCIDENT!
SHE...

SHE'S...
SHE'S
DEAD!



DESPITE MY PLEASING, IT TOTTERS OFF ACROSS THE
OTHER GRAVES... INTO THE COLD WIND. THE WIND THAT
CARRIES BACK TO ME ONCE AGAIN THE LAUGHTER AND
SCORN OF THE OTHERS.



AND WITHIN ME THERE IS AN EMPTYNESS AND A FEAR -
NO DICE MORE. I AMUSINGLY ONCE MORE.

WE WERE THE DAIRY, CYNTHIA AND I... BARREN AND
FRUITLESS AND WAITING. AND THEN THE WAITING
ENDED FOR BOTH OF US. ROLAND WAS GIVEN TO HER,
AND SHE TO ME. BUT LIKE ROLAND LEFT CYNTHIA
TO THE LAUGHTER AND THE SCORN, SHE TOO HAS
LEFT ME. NOW, I CAN ONLY DO AS SHE DID. TRY TO
FORGET.



IT IS CYNTHIA... SHE HOLDS THEM IN HER VICE-LIKE
GRIP AND STRIDES ACROSS THE OTHER GRAVES...
THE OTHER GRAVES THAT HAVE SUDDENLY STOPPED
LAUGHING. SHE HOLDS THEM... ROLAND AND ENID...
HOLDS THEM OUT TO ME...



CYNTHIA IS HOME AGAIN, NOW. THE SCREAMING HAS STOPPED. YES, WE ARE
ALONE, SHE AND I. EACH WAITED. EACH GOT WHAT SHE WANTED FOR...
ONLY TO LOSE IT AGAIN. BUT WHAT WE LOST HAS EVENTUALLY RETURNED
TO US. ROLAND'S AND ENID'S TWISTED, SUCCUMBERED BODIES LIE DEEP
WITHIN ME, PRESSED AGAINST MY EARTH-BEDDING. AND NOW IT IS I WHO
CAN LAUGH. LAUGH AT THE OTHERS.



...FOR NOW I KNOW MY REAL FULFILMENT. I WASN'T LIKE THE OTHERS
AFTER ALL, THEY'RE ALL DOUBLE-BRAKED. I AM A DOUBLE ONE!

THE WIND BLOWS SADLY ACROSS THE BARREN AND BENT
TREES AROUND ME. IT WHISPERS PAST THE COLD STONES
TO LIE SILENT WITH THE EMPTINESS WITHIN ME. AND I
WAIT. AND THEN, ONE NIGHT, FAR AWAY... I HEAR IT. THE
SCREAMING...



SOMETHING IS COMING TOWARD ME, DRAWING THE SCREAM-
ING BISHING IT...

...AND I REACH FOR THEM. CYNTHIA HELPS ME REACH,
SHE SHOOTS ASIDE MY SKIN-CRUST, DROPS OUT MY
INSIDES, PUSHES THEM, SHRIEKING, INTO MY EMBRACE...



HEH, HEH, AND SO, KISSES... OUR
LITTLE BIZZON-BODKIN END ON THIS
BRAVE NOTE. ROLAND AND ENID
WERE FORKED FOR THEIR CRIME.
BURIED ALIVE, BY CYNTHIA'S
CORPSE, AND OUR LITTLE BRAVE
ROTTER THEM HAPPILY EVER
AFTER. SO HOW ABOUT WHERE'S
CYNTHIA THERE DAYS, YOU ASK?
WHY SHE JUST WANDERED AROUND
TILL SHE FOUND SOME OTHER
LONEROME BRAVE AND
DROPPED
IN ON
HER
FOR AN
EXTENDED
VISIT
EYE, NOW!

THE CRYPT-KEEPER'S GRIM FAIRY TALE!

BECAUSE I HAVE RECEIVED SUCH A FLOOD OF REQUESTS (ONE, THE EDITOR'S MOTHER-IN-LAW) I HAVE DECIDED TO TELL YOU ANOTHER INFANTILE INSANITY. AFTER CAREFUL AND INTENSE RESEARCH, I HAVE DISCOVERED THE TRUE FACTS BEHIND THE GRIM FAIRY TALE ABOUT THE PRINCESS WHO SLEPT ALL THOSE YEARS. YOU KNOW... THE ONE CALLED...

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY!



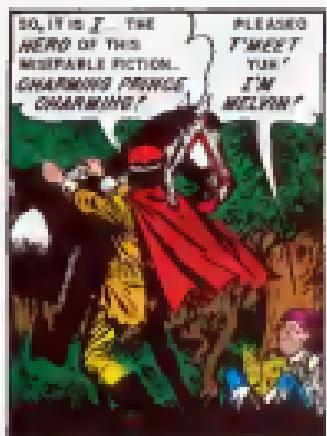
ONCE UPON A TIME, LONG, LONG AGO, IN A KINGDOM FAR AWAY... EVEN FURTHER THAN BROOKLYN, MAYBE... THERE STOOD A CASTLE, COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY A HIGH IMPENET... IMPENET... IMPENET... IT WAS A BLOW OF GROWTHS OF BRAMBLES, BELL THORT AND WHAT-NOT. AND TO THIS CASTLE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY THE IMPENET... IMPENET... THE STUFF, CAME A PRINCE...

"FORGIVE ME, MY GOOD MAN...
WHAT PLACE IS THIS?"

"I SAY, WHAT PLACE IS THIS? WHO LIVES IN THY PALACE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY THAT IMPENET... IMPENET... THAT BRAMBLE FOREST?"

"NO WHO WANTS TO KNOW!"







THE KING WAS SO OVERJOYED WITH HIS NEW PRINCESS, THAT HE ISSUED AN INVITATION...

HERE IS A LIST OF EVERYBODY WHO IS ANYBODY! INVITE THEM TO A FEAST... IN HONOR OF MY NEW DAUGHTER...

YES, YOUR MAJESTY!



THE VIXEN OF THE KINGDOM FLOOZED TO THE FEAST... ER... THEY CAME TO EAT...



BUT THE KING, WHO WAS A POWERFUL KING, HAD FORGOTTEN TO INVITE ONE BIG WHEEL...

AND NOW, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN... YOU WILL ALL MAKE A PREDICTION CONCERNING THE HAPPY FUTURE OF MY NEW DAUGHTER...

COME ON, ETIENNE! THE PARTY'S GETTING DULL!

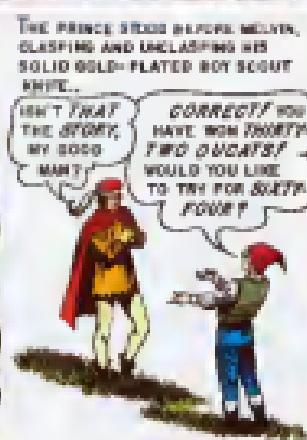


EVERYONE AT THE FEAST WAS SHOCKED AT THE PREDICTION OF THE KING... WHO WASN'T SHOCKED...



BUT A FEARLESSFUL K.I.D. CALMED THE HORRIFIED GATHERING BY PUTTING IN HIS TWO CENTS...





THE PRINCE STOOD UP, SQUARE AND STRONG.

THAT'S BECAUSE NONE OF THEM HAS A SOLID, SHARPENED, GOLD-PLATED BOY'S BUDGET KNIFE!



THE PRINCE TURNED TO THE BRAMBLES.

IT IS LATE. SOON IT WILL BE DARK! I MUST HURRY! "BYE!" "HARRY" "REWIND!" "BYE!"



THE BRAVE PRINCE STRUCK OFF INTO THE THICK GROWTH OF THORNY BRAMBLES.

SEE HOW THE LETHALLY ARMED BRANCHES FALL BEFORE THE STEEL BLADE OF MY STURDY SOLID GOLD-PLATED BOY'S BUDGET KNIFE!

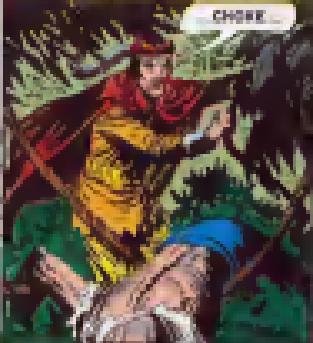


... HOUR AFTER HOUR, HE RACED.

WELL, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT? IT'S A MAD STORY!



TIME AND TIME AGAIN, HE PASSED SHED-UP SURVIVORS, MUMMIFIED SKELETONS OF PRINCE CHARMINGS WHO HAD VAINLY ATTEMPTED TO REACH THE SLEEPING BEAUTY...



... THE SUN WAS JUST BEGINNING TO SET WHEN CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING REACHED THE CASTLE DOOR.

ONE MORE MAD AND I'LL BE THROUGH...



FINALLY, THE PRINCE BURST OPEN THE CASTLE DOOR.

SLEEPING BEAUTY! I'M HERE!



BREATHLESSLY, HE RUSHED FROM ROOM TO ROOM.

SLEEPING BEAUTY? WHERE ARE YOU?



AND THEN...

... "THE SLEEPING BEAUTY... SLEEPING!"



CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING STOOD BEFORE THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

"HMM? WHAT A BEAUTY!"



SLOWLY HE BENT AND KISSED HER.



OUTSIDE, THE SUN HAD SET. THE SLEEPING BEAUTY FLUTTERED HER EYES... OPENED HER EYES...

"IT IS I, SLEEPING BEAUTY! I HAVE RESCUED YOU!"



THE SLEEPING BEAUTY SAT UP... ALL THESE FEARS, YOU DARNED HAVE SLEPT, UNTIL... S...



"MOM? ONLY IN THE DAY, CAN I SLEEP... CHUH!"



THE SLEEPING BEAUTY LEAPED FROM HER BED...

"AT NIGHT, I'M MORE AWAKE! I DO DAYTIME THAT IMPENET... IMPENET... THAT MEANS OUT THERE AND FIND THE SICKERS WHO ARE TRAPPED IN IT..."



THE SLEEPING BEAUTY'S FANGS BLISTERED... AND I DRINK THEIR BLOOD FOR YOU SELL...



"... AS SHE SUCK THEM INTO CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING'S THROAT..."



"WELL, WELL, THAT'S MY CHILDISH SISTER TO U. THIS ADVICE, CRAP! I HOPE YOU LIKED MY MAGAZINE 'HORSE BIT' NOVELLETTE? AND NOW, I SMELL THE OLD WITCH'S POT BREWERS. THE OLD GAL IS WAITING TO FEED YOU FOUL FARE AND WIND UP BY RECK-RAVE. SO I'LL BE SHOVELING ALONG! READY HOLD HORSE EYES... RIGHT..."



THE END

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE! AND NOW IT'S WIND-UP TIME IN EZY'S BED-ROCK, AND YOUR HOSTESS IN THE MANTLE OF FEAR, YOUR STOREHOUSE OF SEVERE STORIES, YOUR DINER-OUTLET OF DELICIOUS DESSERTS, THE OLD WITCH, IS READY WITH HER BEEATING CAULDRON. SO TUCK YOUR CROOKED CUPS UNDER YOUR CHINNERS CRIMS AND IT'LL BEGIN THE FREE FARE I CALL...

SHADOW OF DEATH

COME WITH ME TO A LONELY CORNER IN THE DOWNTOWN BUSINESS SECTION OF A LARGE CITY. OVERHEAD, THE LAST TWINKLING STAR IS FINALLY RETREATING BEFORE THE ADVANCING LIGHT OF DAWN, AND THE SLEEPING CITY IS AWAKENING TO THE SOUNDS OF JAMMING ALARM CLOCKS. BUT LONG BEFORE THE CITY'S OFFICE WORKERS AND BURY HOUSEWIVES HAVE RISEN FROM THEIR MARM BEDS, EZRA MORTON HAS BEEN ON THE JOB. THERE HE IS NOW, UNLOCKING HIS LITTLE NEWSPRINT AND SWINGING HIS DOORS. NOTICE HOW EZRA LADDERS, WINCING IN PAIN. YES, DEAR READER, EZRA IS AN INFIRM. A GRIFFLED NEWSPAPERLER. EZRA MORTON IS PARALYZED FROM THE WAIST DOWN...



NOTICE THE BUNDLES OF MORNING NEWSPAPERS STACKED ON THE COUNTER BEHIND EZRA'S NEWSPRINT, READY TO BE UNITED AND LAIN OUT MONTHLY OR DAILY. SEE HOW EZRA STRUGGLES, BENDING IN HIS WHEELCHAIR AND LIFTING THE HEAVY PCKAGES...



NOW SEE THE DARK AND DESERTED SUBWAY KIOSK NEARBY, INTO WHICH, IN A FEW MINUTES, THE OFFICE-BOUNDED SECRETARIES AND THE FACTORY-BOUNDED LABORERS WILL BEGIN TO FLOW, ARMED WITH THE NEWSPAPERS THEY HAVE PURCHASED FROM EZRA'S STAND.



YES, DEAR READER, EZRA SMILES. HE SMILES BECAUSE HE IS CONTENT. FOR THIS IS HIS LOT. ALL THAT MATTERS TO HIM, THIS LITTLE NEWSSTAND, WITH ITS FEW HUNDRED DAILY PAPER SALES, IS EZRA'S CASTLE. ITS MEAGER PROFIT IS THE LINE DRAWN BETWEEN INDEPENDENCE AND STARVATION FOR HIM. SO EZRA SMILES. BUT EZRA DOES NOT SMILE FOR LONG. SUDDENLY EZRA CATCHES SIGHT OF A FIGURE STANDING NEAR THE SUBWAY KIOSK...



AND NOW THE PEOPLE ARE BEGINNING TO HURRY FROM ALL DIRECTIONS TOWARD THE SUBWAY ENTRANCE. AND THE BIG MAN WITH THE PAPERS UNDER HIS ARMS HURRIES TO MEET THEM ON STRONG LEGS THAT ARE NOT WITHERED AND PARALYZED AS EZRA'S ARE...



NO, EZRA IS READY FOR THEM. FOR THE PARADE OF HUMANITY TO PUSH BY HIS STAND AND Toss ITS COPPER PENNIES UPON HIS PAPERWEIGHTS AND EAT AWAY AT THE STACKS UNTIL, ONLY A FEW LAST BATTERED COPIES REMAIN. SEE HOW HE SMILES.



...A MAN CLUTCHING A STACK OF NEWSPAPERS UNDER HIS HUGE ARM



YES, EZRA DOES NOT SMILE. FEAR GRIPS EZRA'S HELPLESS BODY. THAT MAN, THAT MAN WITH THE PAPERS AND THE HEALTHY LEGS IS STEALING PAPER SALES THAT ORDINARILY WOULD BE EZRA'S.



EZRA BEGINS TO DO WHAT HE HAS NEVER DONE BEFORE. HE CALLS OUT, TRYING TO ATTRACT ATTENTION, CALLING FOR SALES, IMPUDICIOUS, REMINISCING THE MASS OF HUMANITY WITH HEALTHY LEGS THAT IT HAS ALWAYS BOUGHT ITS PAPERS FROM HIM...



AND NOW, THE MORNING RUSH HOUR IS ALMOST OVER. EZRA'S PAPER STACKS STAND HIGH AND HARDLY TOUCHED. THE MAN WITH THE HEALTHY LEGS WAVES TO EZRA.



THE MAN MOVES OFF. EZRA STARES AT THE UNSOLD PAPERS PILED UPON HIS NEWSSTAND COUNTER.

SHOUL' I'LL, I'LL, I'LL, I'LL BE ABLE TO SELL THESE NOW...



ALL DAY LONG, EZRA SITS IN HIS WHEELCHAIR TRYING TO SELL HIS PAPERS TO THE FEW WHO STRAGGLE BY HIS STAND.



FINALLY, DARKNESS BEGINS TO FALL. SADLY, EZRA TIES HIS UNSOLD PAPERS INTO BUNDLES AND DEPOSITS THEM ON THE COUNTER FOR THE TRUCKS TO PICK UP WHEN THEY DELIVER THE NEXT DAY'S EDITIONS.



BUT THE EYES-EYED PEOPLE ARE BLIND. IN THEIR RUSH TO CATCH THEIR TRAINS, THEY DO NOT NOTICE THAT THEY ARE BUYING THEIR MORNING PAPERS FROM SOMEONE NEW.



THE NEXT MORNING THE MAN IS THERE AGAIN, HURTING ABOUT ON HIS STRONG LEGS, SELLING HIS PAPERS TO THE UNAWARE PUBLIC, WHILE EZRA CRIES IN KNEE...



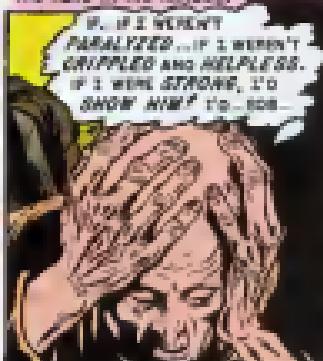
THE DAYS PASS. EVERY MORNING THE MAN IS THERE, STEALING SALES FROM EZRA. AND EVERY NIGHT, EZRA COUNTS HIS UNSOLED PAPERS AND TIES THEM INTO BUNDLES.

I'LL... I'LL NEVER MAKE ENOUGH TO LIVE ON THIS WAY!



BUT WHAT CAN EZRA DO? WHAT CAN A CRIPPLE DO TO A MAN WITH A HEALTHY STRONG BODY? THE TRUCKMAN LEAVES. EZRA SITS WITH HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS...

IF I WEREN'T PARALYZED... IF I WEREN'T CRIPPLED AND HELPLESS. IF I WERE STRONG, I'D SHOW HIM! TO... SOS...



IT RISES FROM ITS WHEEL CHAIR, RAVENING...



A WEEK GOES BY. TWO, ONE MORNING, A TRUCKMAN WHO DELIVERS EZRA'S PAPERS WARNS HIM...

IF YOU CAN'T SELL MORE PAPERS THAN THIS, EZRA, WE'LL CUT YOU OUT OF OUR DELIVERY ROUTE.

I'LL, I'LL, I'LL DO SOMETHING!

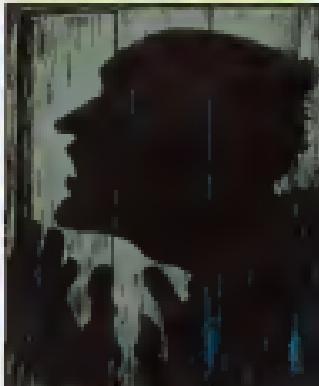


ABOVE, THE SKY IS JUST BEGINNING TO SHOW LIGHT. THE GLOW FROM A NEARBY STREETLAMP CASTS EZRA'S SHADOW UP AGAINST HIS HEADSTRAIN.



TO SOS SOS I'D...

SUDDENLY, EZRA'S SHADOW LIFTS ITS HEAD FROM ITS HANDS...



IT SLIDES OFF, DOWN THE DESERTED STREET, ON UNSTEADY LEGS...



IT SLIDES ACROSS BRICK WALLS...



BOARD FENCES...



...HESITATES BEFORE A HARDWARE STORE...



IT REACHES IN, PLUCKING THE SHADOW OF THE AXE
HANGING IN THE WINDOW...



...LIFTING AWAY THE SHADOW OF THE SHOVEL, STANDING
ABOUT THE SURROUNDING TOOLS...



...BACK ACROSS BOARD FENCES...



...BACK ACROSS BRICK WALLS...



...TO A FAMILIAR CORNER, WHERE A
FAMILIAR SHADOW STANDS WITH THE
SHADOW OF A HUGE BUNDLE OF
PAPERS UNDER ITS ARMS...



ERAS'S SHADOW LIFTS THE SHADOW OF THE AXE IT HAS STOLEN...



... AND BRINGS IT DOWN UPON THE FAMILAR SHADOW WITH THE PAPERS UNDER ITS ARMS...



THE SHADOWS OF THE PAPERS SCATTER ACROSS THE BUILDING WALL AS THE FIGURE CRUMPLES, SPURTING A SHADOW-FOUNTAIN FROM ITS WOUNDS...



ERAS'S SHADOW PEERS AT IT, THE CRUMPLED SHADOW STIRS... ERAS'S SHADOW LIFTS THE AXE SHADOW ONCE MORE...



NOW ERAS'S SHADOW DRAWS THE LIFELESS SHADOW DOWN THE ALLEY BETWEEN THE BUILDINGS...



... DEPOSITING IT IN AN EMPTY LOT BESIDE A FADED BILLBOARD...



WITH THE SHADOW-SHOVEL, EZRA'S SHADOW Digs A
SHALLOW SHADOW-GRATE BEHIND THE BILLBOARD...



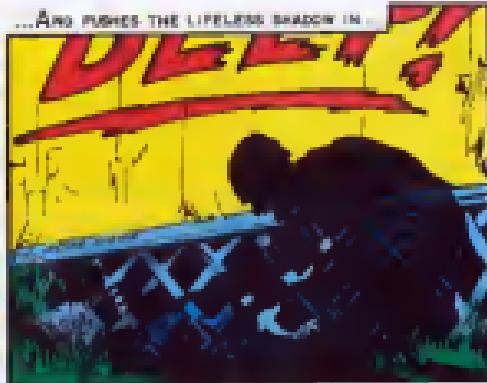
...THEN, EZRA'S SHADOW RETURNS TO
THE NEWSSTAND WHERE EZRA STILL
SITS WITH HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS...



...AND EZRA'S SHADOW ASSUMES
EZRA'S POSITION AS EZRA HOURS...



...AND PUSHES THE LIFELESS SHADOW IN...



...Ezra shovels the shadow-soil in upon it...

EZRA ROLLS HIS WHEELCHAIR TO THE
CRUMPLED FORM OF THE BIG MAN WITH
THE HEALTHY LEGS LYING AMONG HIS
SCATTERED PAPERS...



LATER, THE MORGUE-BACON ATTENDANTS LIFT THE BODY OF THE MAN WHO
ALMOST STOLE EZRA'S BUSINESS FROM HIM. AS THEY CARRY IT TO THE WAITING TRUCK, EZRA SAYS...



WHICH IS THE NEATEST TRAP OF
THE SPIDER, WOULDN'T YOU SAY? WELL,
THAT'S MY REVOLVING RECIPE
FOR ZEPHYRUS, SPIDER. NOW IT'S
TIME TO PUT OUT THE FIRE UNDER MY
FOT AND CLOSE THE DOORS TO THE
HAUNT OF FEAR, SO
TODDLE ALONG. WE
GADABOUTS WILL
ALL BE BACK NEXT
IN V.R.'S MAS, THE
VAULT OF HORROR.

'BYE, NOW, ER,
I SAID WEE?'
GO ON'N SCREAM,
ALREADY!'

FOR ALTHOUGH THE MORNING SUN IS SHINING BRIGHTLY, THE DEAD BOY'S
BODY CASTS HIS SHADOW.





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